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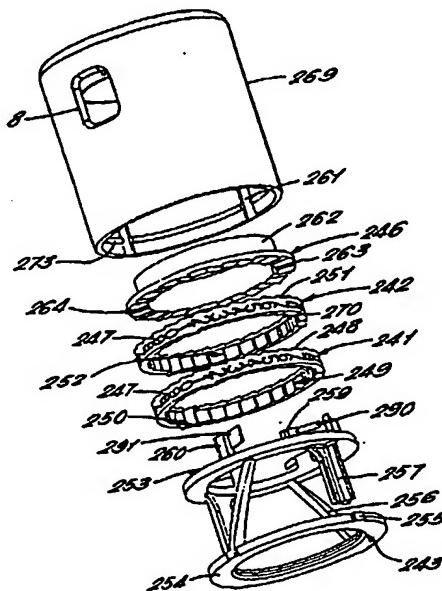
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(54) Abstract Title

(57) An apparatus, such as an inhaler, comprising a housing (1) defining a portion (2) receiving a dose-dispensing container (20), has a dose counter comprising at least one annular counter member 241, 242 and a helix-like coil 243. The helix-like coil may comprise an upper ring 253 and lower ring 254 connected by flexible struts 256. The upper ring 253 has a pair of projections 259, 260, each having a pawl which selectively engages teeth 249, 252 of counter members 241, 242. The counter members and helix-like coil are held within a cap 269 placed over the container (20). The user depresses the cap which depresses the container. Compression of the helix-like coil during operation causes the lower ring 254 to move towards the upper ring 253 and at the same time, due to the flexible struts, the upper ring rotates. As the upper ring rotates the pawls on the projections 259, 260 engage the teeth of the counter members 241, 242 causing them to advance.

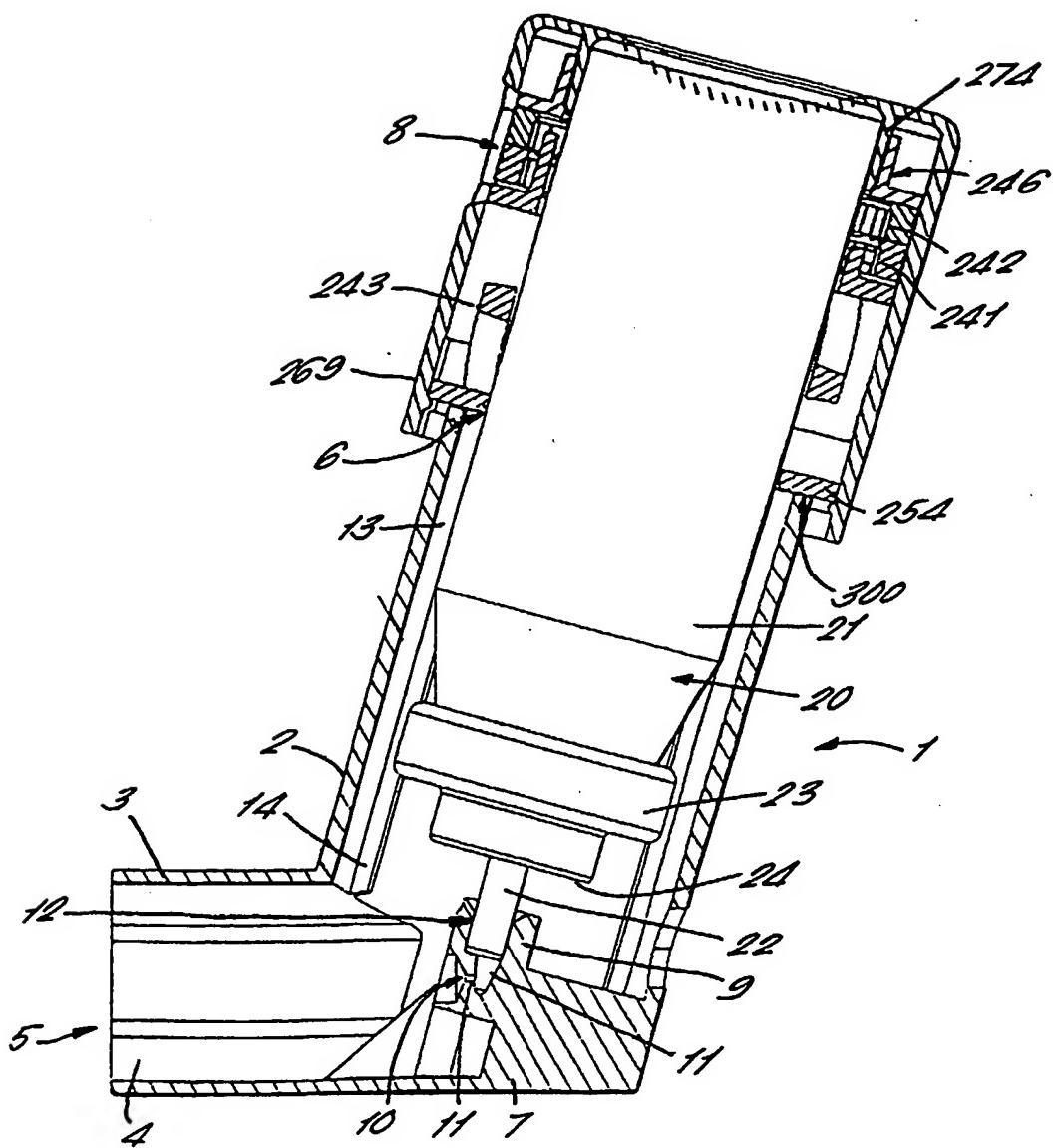
FIG. 2.



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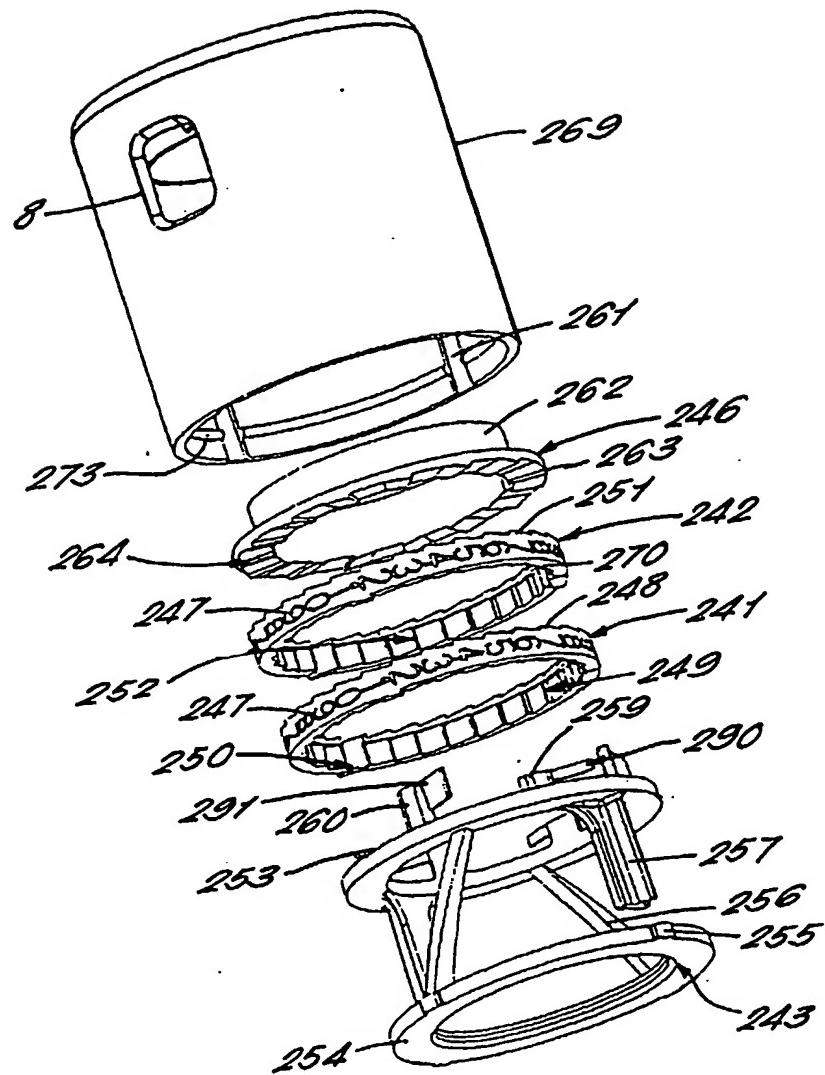
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FIG. 1.



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FIG. 2.



DOSAGE COUNTING DEVICES

The present invention relates to counting devices for use with dose-dispensing delivery apparatus which 5 require an axial force for operation.

It has been recognised that there is a need to provide accurate information to the user of a dose-dispensing delivery apparatus concerning the number of doses delivered from, or remaining in, the apparatus. 10 Without such accurate information there is the danger that a user will forget how many doses have been delivered and hence take a greater or fewer number of doses than is required. There is also the danger that a user may be unaware that the delivery apparatus is 15 empty or close to empty. Hence, in an emergency situation, the user may seek to take a dose from the delivery apparatus only to find that there are no doses left in the apparatus. This is especially dangerous where the delivery apparatus is for use in dispensing medicinal compounds for the treatment of 20 chronic or acute symptoms, for example, as in the case of a pressurised metered dose inhaler used for treating asthmatic reactions.

A number of devices have been proposed to count 25 the number of doses delivered or remaining in a delivery apparatus. WO95/08484 teaches a dose counting device for use with an aerosol medication dispenser. The device works by translating a non-rotative force on an outer cover into a rotation of an 30 indicator wheel by use of a set of flexible pawls engaged with a set of teeth. The pawls depress and thereby extend circumferentially when the applied force forces them to effect a rotation of the teeth. This device has, however, been found to have 35 disadvantages. The reliability of operation of the counting device depends on the relationship between the stiffness of the internal spring bias of the

medication dispenser and the pawls. If the pawls are too stiff relative to the internal spring bias then the medication dispenser may dispense a dose before the pawls flex sufficiently to rotate the indicator
5 wheel; a dose would be delivered without the counter registering it. Alternatively, if the pawls are too flexible relative to the internal spring bias then the pawls may flex sufficiently to rotate the indicator wheel before the medication dispenser has dispensed a dose;
10 a dose would be registered by the counter but not actually delivered.

The present invention seeks to provide a dosage counting device which overcomes these problems.

Accordingly, the present invention provides
15 apparatus comprising a housing defining a portion for receiving in use a dose-dispensing container, the housing containing a dose counter comprising at least one annular counter member and a helix-like coil, wherein one or more projections are provided on the
20 helix-like coil for operatively connecting the helix-like coil and the at least one annular counter member, wherein movement of the received dose-dispensing container acts to compress the helix-like coil to thereby rotate the at least one annular counter
25 member.

The present invention also provides apparatus comprising a housing defining a portion for receiving in use a dose-dispensing container, the housing containing a dose counter comprising at least one annular counter member, a helix-like coil having one or projections for operatively connecting the helix-like coil and the at least one annular counter member, and a support for supporting the at least one annular counter member and helix-like coil in proper alignment
30 with the received dose-dispensing container, wherein the support is an interference fit in a cap of the housing such that a first actuation of the received
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dose-dispensing container sets the position of the support relative to the received dose-dispensing container and cap.

5 An embodiment of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

10 Figure 1 is a cross-sectional view of a dispensing apparatus according to the present invention; and

Figure 2 is an exploded perspective view of part of the dispensing apparatus of Figure 1.

15 In the following description, the invention will be illustrated, by way of example only, with respect to a pressurised dispensing container capable of delivering successive doses of a product in an aerosol form.

20 Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a dispensing apparatus according to the present invention.

The dispensing apparatus comprises a housing 1 having a cylindrical portion 2 with upper and lower ends. The upper end 6 is open whilst the lower end is closed off by a basal wall portion 7. A mouthpiece 3 which communicates with the cylindrical portion 2, depends laterally from the lower end of the cylindrical portion 2. The mouthpiece 3 defines an outlet duct 4 which terminates in an outlet 5 of the mouthpiece 3.

30 An inwardly directed valve stem receiving block 9 is integrally formed with the basal wall portion 7 and has its longitudinal axis aligned co-axially with a longitudinal axis of the cylindrical portion 2 of the housing 1. The valve stem receiving block 9 defines a receiving bore 12 which is open to the cylindrical portion 2 and an orifice 10 which is open to the

outlet duct 4 of the mouthpiece 3. The receiving bore 12 and orifice 10 are linked by a duct 11.

Several, preferably six circumferentially spaced inwardly directed longitudinal ribs 14 are provided on the internal wall of the cylindrical portion 2.

In use a pressurised dispensing container 20 is received in the cylindrical portion 2. The pressurised dispensing container 20 comprises a canister body 21 defining a storage chamber for housing the product to be dispensed. The canister body 21 is closed off at one end by a metering valve (not shown) having a valve stem 22 which extends externally from the metering valve. The metering valve is retained in the canister body by a crimped ferrule 23.

When the pressurised dispensing container 20 is inserted into the housing 1, the valve stem 22 is received in receiving bore 12 of the valve stem receiving block 9. An annular air gap 13 exists between the internal wall of the cylindrical portion 2 and the canister body 21 to allow air to flow through the dispensing apparatus in use.

According to the present invention a dosage counter is provided comprising first and second indicator wheels 241, 242, a helical coil 243 and support 246. The first and second indicator wheels 241, 242 comprise indicia 247 marked on their peripheral walls. The first indicator wheel 241 denotes numerical 'units' and the second indicator wheel 242 denotes numerical 'tens'. Each indicator wheel 241, 242 is annular.

The upper rim of the first indicator wheel 241 is formed into a series of teeth which will be denoted as the upper teeth 248 of the first indicator wheel 241. In addition, the first indicator wheel 241 comprises a series of internal teeth 249 arranged around a lower portion of the internal rim of the annulus. The first

indicator wheel 241 also comprises three evenly distributed radial notches 250 on the upper half of the internal rim of the annulus. Alternatively, two or more than three notches 250 may be provided.

5 The lower rim of the second indicator wheel 242 is formed into a series of teeth which will be denoted as the lower teeth 270 of the second indicator wheel 242. The upper rim of the second indicator wheel 242 is formed into a series of teeth which will be denoted 10 as the upper teeth 251 of the second indicator wheel 242. In addition, the second indicator wheel 242 comprises a series of internal teeth 252 arranged around a lower portion of the internal rim of the annulus.

15 The support 246 comprises an annular portion 262 from which depends an annular flange 263 whose lower face is formed into a series of teeth which will be denoted as the lower teeth 264 of the support 246.

20 The helical coil 243 comprises an upper ring 253 and a lower ring 254 which are interconnected by two flexible helical struts 256. The lower ring 254 comprises four equi-spaced radially outwardly directed protrusions 255. The upper ring 253 is provided with at least one pair of upper and lower arms 260, 259 25 extending upwardly therefrom. Each arm is provided with a laterally dependent finger portion forming a pawl which selectively engages the internal teeth 249, 252 of the first and second indicator wheels 241, 242 as described below. Two vertical struts 257 depend 30 from the upper ring 253 and extend partially towards the lower ring 254.

35 The first and second indicator wheels 241, 242, helical coil 243 and support 246 are assembled within a cap 269. The cap 269 is generally cylindrical in shape and is closed off at an upper end. A window 8 is formed in a side wall near the upper end. Four longitudinally directed recesses 261 are formed equi-

spaced around the internal surface of the cap 269. An annular inwardly directed rim 273 is provided near the open end of the cap 269.

The dosage counter is assembled by first
5 inserting the support 246 into the cap 269. The support 246 forms a push-fit with the internal wall of the cap 269. The second indicator wheel 242, first indicator wheel 241 and helical coil 243 are then inserted into the cap 269 in that order. The four
10 protrusions 255 of the lower ring 254 are received in the longitudinal recesses 261 of the cap 269. The components of the dosage counter are retained within the cap 269 by the interference of the lower ring 254 of the helical coil 243 and the annular rim 273 of the
15 cap 269.

In the assembled position, the fingers 290 of the lower arms 259 of are aligned with the internal teeth 249 of the first indicator wheel 241. The fingers 291 of the upper arms 260 are partially aligned with the internal teeth 252 of the second indicator wheel 242 and partially aligned with the upper half of the internal rim of the first indicator wheel 241. Hence, the fingers 290 of the lower arms 259 are always engaged with the internal teeth 249 of the first
20 indicator wheel 241 but the fingers 291 of the upper arms 260 are normally held out of engagement with the internal teeth 252 of the second indicator wheel 242 due to the presence of the internal rim of the first
25 indicator wheel 241.

30 The pressurised dispensing container 20 is received in the housing 1. The cap 269 is then placed over the upper end of the pressurised dispensing container 20. A tubular extension 274 is provided within the cap 269 into which the canister body 21 forms a push-fit so as to retain the cap 269 in engagement with the housing 1. With the cap 269 engaged with the housing 1, the lower ring 254 abuts
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and rests on the upper end 6 of the cylindrical portion 2 of the housing 1 against the upper rim 300.

In use, a user operates the pressurised dispensing container 21 by depressing the closed end 5 of cap 269 axially to move it and the canister body 21 relative to the cylindrical portion 2 of the housing 1. As a result, the valve stem 22 is inwardly retracted relative to the metering valve such that a dose of product is dispensed from the valve stem 22 10 into the bore 12 and duct 11 of the valve stem receiving block 9. The product is then channelled by duct 11 and dispensed as an aerosol through orifice 10 into the outlet duct 4. The aerosol is inhaled by a user inhaling on outlet 5 of the mouthpiece 3. The 15 support 246 is a push-fit within the cap 269 and therefore does not move axially during a normal operating cycle. Axial movement of the cap 269 causes the lower ring 254 to be compressed towards the upper ring 253 of the helical coil 243. At the same time, 20 due to the helical struts 256, the upper ring 253 rotates relative to the lower ring 254 which cannot rotate relative to the cap 269 due to the engagement of the protrusions 256 in the longitudinal recesses 261.

25 As the upper ring 253 rotates, the first indicator wheel 241 is incrementally rotated due to engagement of the fingers 290 of the lower arms 259 with the internal teeth 249.

The degree of axial movement of the upper ring 30 253 relative to the lower ring 254 is limited by the vertical struts 257 which ground against the lower ring 254.

After successive rotations of the first indicator wheel 241 the fingers 291 of the upper arms 260 are 35 brought into alignment with the radial notches 250 of the first indicator wheel 241. As a consequence, the fingers 291 of the upper arms 160 can flex radially

outwards so as to engage the internal teeth 252 of the second indicator wheel 242. Consequently, the second indicator wheel 242 rotates one increment on the next actuation of the metering valve. In this way, the
5 'tens' indicia can be incremented once for every ten increments of the 'units' indicia.

On release of the canister body 21 by the user, the pressurised dispensing container 20 returns to its rest position as described above. At the same time,
10 the helical coil 243 recovers to its original shape. The angling of the fingers 290, 291 of the upper and lower arms 260, 259, and the teeth of the support 246 and first and second indicator wheels 241, 242 prevents any reverse movement of the indicator wheels
15 241, 242 during this part of the operating cycle.

The dosage counter is 'set' in the cap 269 on the first actuation as follows:

The support 246 is assembled in the cap 269 at a point below its normal operating position, i.e.,
20 nearer the open end of the cap than shown in Figure 1.

Consequently, the first and second indicator wheels 241, 242 and helical coil 243 are all also nearer the open end than their normal operating positions. On the first actuation, which may be
25 undertaken by the user or at the point of manufacture or sale, the upper rim 300 at the upper end 6 of the housing 1 initially compresses the helical coil 243 without moving the support 246. Once the helical coil 243 has been compressed such that the vertical struts
30 257 have contacted the lower ring 254 (during which movement the metering valve is actuated), the user, pharmacist or manufacturer applies a higher axial force to the cap 269 to move both the helical coil 243 and support 246 axially relative to the cap 269 until
35 the retracted valve stem 22 'grounds' against the base of the receiving bore 12 of the valve stem receiving block 9. The support 246 is now in its normal

operating position and is 'set'. The setting of the support 246 takes into account any variations in distance between the upper rim 300 at the upper end 6 of the housing 1 and the end of the valve stem 22.

- 5 Without this feature, it is possible for variations in pressurised dispensing containers to mean that in certain circumstances, the metering valve may be actuated before the first indicator wheel 241 rotates or vice versa.

Claims:

1. Apparatus comprising a housing defining a portion for receiving in use a dose-dispensing container, the
5 housing containing a dose counter comprising at least one annular counter member and a helix-like coil,
wherein one or more projections are provided on the
helix-like coil for operatively connecting the helix-
like coil and the at least one annular counter member,
10 wherein movement of the received dose-dispensing
container acts to compress the helix-like coil to
thereby rotate the at least one annular counter
member.
- 15 2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1 wherein the
helix-like coil comprises an upper ring, a lower ring
and at least one strut spanning between the upper and
lower rings.
- 20 3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 2 wherein the at
least one strut is helically shaped.
4. Apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or claim 3
wherein one of the upper or lower rings of the helix-
25 like coil comprises one or more projections orientated
towards the other of the upper or lower rings to
thereby limit the movement of the upper and lower
rings towards one another.
- 30 5. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim
wherein each of the at least one annular counter
members comprise a first series of teeth, the
projections of the helix-like coil being selectively
engagable with each of the first series of teeth such
35 that rotational movement of the helix-like coil causes
the at least one annular counter member to rotate
relative to the housing in a first direction.

6. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5 wherein the first series of teeth are formed around an inner rim of the at least one annular counter members.

5 7. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the dose counter comprises two or more annular counter members.

10 8. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the housing comprises a cap.

15 9. Apparatus as claimed in claim 8 further comprising a support slidably received in the cap to support the at least one annular counter member and helix-like coil in proper alignment.

20 10. Apparatus as claimed in claim 8 or claim 9 wherein the lower ring of the helix-like coil contacts an upper end of the dose-dispensing container receiving portion of the housing.

25 11. Apparatus as claimed in claim 9 or claim 10 wherein a surface of the support is formed into a series of teeth engagable with a second series of teeth formed on the second annular counter member, so as to prevent rotation of the annular counter members in a direction opposed to the first direction.

30 12. Apparatus as claimed in any of claims 5 to 11 wherein the helix-like coil comprises at least one ratchet engagable with the first series of teeth formed on each of the annular counter members, so as to prevent rotation of the annular counter members in a direction opposed to the first direction.

35 13. Apparatus as claimed in claim 12 wherein a bearing surface is provided forming at least part of

the inner rim of the first annular counting member to selectively hold the projections out of engagement with the first series of teeth of the second annular counter member, the bearing surface comprising at least one indent allowing movement of the projections radially outwardly into engagement with the first series of teeth of the second annular counter member after a pre-determined number of incremental rotations of the first annular counter member.

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14. Apparatus as claimed in any of claims 7 to 13 wherein the first annular counter member is driven to incrementally rotate in the first direction on each actuation of the received dose-dispensing container and the second annular counter member is driven to incrementally rotate in the first direction only after a pre-determined number of incremental rotations of the first annular counter member.

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15. Apparatus comprising a housing defining a portion for receiving in use a dose-dispensing container, the housing containing a dose counter comprising at least one annular counter member, a helix-like coil having one or projections for operatively connecting the helix-like coil and the at least one annular counter member, and a support for supporting the at least one annular counter member and helix-like coil in proper alignment with the received dose-dispensing container, wherein the support is an interference fit in a cap of the housing such that a first actuation of the received dose-dispensing container sets the position of the support relative to the received dose-dispensing container and cap.

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16. Apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.



Application No: GB 0104557.4
Claims searched: 1 - 15

Examiner: David Hotchkiss
Date of search: 19 September 2001

Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.S): F1R (RDX)

Int Cl (Ed.7): B65D (83/14); A61M (15/00); G06M (1/04)

Other: Online: WPI; EPODOC; JAPIO

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
A	EP 1065477 (Microspray Delta) Whole document especially paragraphs 21 & 22 and flexible tangs 17 & 19	
A	EP 0480488 (Elettro Plastica) Whole document especially elastically flexible legs 16 and upper part 14.	

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